

Michigan's new drunk driving standard: .08 blood alcohol content – What every driver needs to know

There are no hard and fast rules or guidelines to definitively answer how much a person can drink before reaching .08 blood alcohol content.

First and foremost all drivers should consider the following:

- Whether they are drinking on a full stomach or an empty stomach. If they are drinking on a full stomach, the food will help in absorbing the alcohol before it gets to the blood.
- What are they drinking and how fast they are drinking it.
- Their body weight. It plays a role in the absorption of alcohol.
- The sex of the person also plays a role. Women, because of their body physique, will have a higher BAC than a man of the same weight if they are drinking the same amount of alcohol.
- A drink is a drink is a drink. A standard drink is one shot of liquor (1.5 oz.) or a 12-ounce glass of beer or a five-ounce glass of wine.

From the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
The Effect of Alcohol on Ability

With each drink consumed, a person's blood alcohol concentration increases. Although outward appearances vary, virtually all drivers are substantially impaired at .08 BAC. Laboratory and on-road research shows that the vast majority of drivers, even experienced drivers, are significantly impaired at .08 with regard to critical driving tasks such as braking, steering, lane changing, judgment and divided attention. Decrements in performance for drivers at .08 BAC are on the order of 40-60% worse than when they are at .00 BAC. Research findings suggest that the most crucial aspect of impairment is the reduction in the ability to handle several tasks at once. This skill is precisely what driving a motor vehicle requires.

The risk of being in a motor vehicle crash also increases as the BAC level rises. The risk of being in a crash rises gradually with each BAC level, but then rises very rapidly after a driver reaches or exceeds .08 BAC compared to drivers with no alcohol in their system. Research by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety indicates that the relative risk of being killed in a single vehicle crash for drivers at BACs between .05 and .09 is 11 times that of drivers with no alcohol in their system.

Blood alcohol content and areas of impairment:

By the time a person reaches .08 blood alcohol content, the alcohol affects:

- eye movement control
- standing
- steadiness
- coordination
- information processing
- judgment
- concentrated attention
- speed control